

PRIZE POEM.

LO! THE POOR INDIAN!

—BY THE—

REV. GEO. MASON, M.A.,

(ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD.)

RECTOR OF ST. PAUL'S, NANAIMO, BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Read before the Mechanics' Literary Institute,
Victoria, Thursday, October 28, 1875.

VICTORIA, B. C.:

ALEX. BOND, BOOK AND JOB PRINTER, FORT STREET.

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MADE in the image of his Maker,—man,
Howe'er degraded, yet reflects the plan
Original,—as by the eternal mind
In archetypal beauty first designed ;—
Of various feature, colour, habit, all
Their primal birthright faithfully recall ;—
The same in kind, tho' diff'ring in degree,
They form but one vast human family.
Why should the proud Caucasian scorn to own
His dusky brother of the torrid zone,
Or deem the fairer skin by right may claim
Superior station and a nobler name ?
If, as we boast, the Anglo-Saxon race
Hold in the scale of nations foremost place,
Be sure that He from whom the blessing flows,
For some wise reason eminence bestows ;—
And not to foster arrogance or pride,
Doth the Omniscient His gifts divide
To every creature,—working as He will
Among the sons of men, His purpose still.

Thus holding with my thoughts mute conference
On human mysteries,—the shadows dense
Of giant pines, fell with their sadd'ning gloom
Around my soul, as weird forms o'er the tomb
Of extinct races, sougning their refrain :—

“ From dust they sprang, to dust return again,”—
When, lo ! strange voices barbarously rude,
Disturb the silence of my solitude ;
And uncouth figures meet my dreamy gaze,
“ To point a moral ” for these latter days.
Behold these squalid relics of the past,
Wrecks on Time’s changeful billows drifting past,
Hope’s future darken’d, self-reliance gone,
They cower abash’d before the stranger’s scorn ;
Too low for vengeance, or with smother’d hate
His meaner vice they basely imitate ;
Nor can the memory of their chieftain sires
Inflame the embers of their wonted fires.

A time there was, ere yet the white man’s power
Had robbed the Indian of his rightful dower,
Received from heaven, through nature’s willing hand,
To roam unchallenged down the rocky strand,
Or spear the salmon for his daily food ;—
Or chase the red deer through the tangled wood,—
Strip shaggy bruin of his winter dress,
To form his couch, or clothe his nakedness.
Untutor’d savage ! aye, but nature’s child,
By civilised excesses undefiled !
If small his knowledge of the good and right,
Small, too, his danger of rejecting light ;—
His ignorance was bliss—nor yet incurred
The penalty of laws he had not heard.
His bow and spear, his paddle and canoe
Were the chief treasures his ambition knew ;—
Worn with the chase, the fresh spring quench’d his
thirst,—
Nor craved he then the liquid fire accurs’d.

Oft on the summer eve his hours were spent
In manly sports with savage merriment ;
The mimic combat, choral dance and song
Thrill'd with fierce rapture all the exulting throng,
Till o'er the festal scene the moonbeams play'd,
And in his careless sleep the Indian chief was laid.

The dream is past ! The native claims no more
His reckless freedom as in days of yore ;—
The pine wood's booty, and the river's spoil
Are not your own, ye children of the soil !
Ask of your masters' leave, who lead the way
To purer knowledge ! learn to work and pray !
They bring a glorious message from above,
The joyful tidings of a Saviour's love,
Of Him, whose earthly work was doing good,
Who died for man upon the Holy Rood.
Learn in the white man's footsteps to despise
All worldly idols for the eternal prize !

Would it were so ! Would God the historic page
In truth might trace a brighter, happier age
For the poor Indian, since the stranger came,
And gave his native shores the foreign name.
Alas ! the mournful muse recounts the tale
Of vice and misery with their deadly trail,
Tracking their progress who were sent to bless,
But only taught enlightened selfishness.
To them the high prerogative was given
To preach the truth, and train the soul for heaven ;
To heal the sick,—with amulets of peace,
Bidding the heart's tumultuous passions cease.
They brought instead the madd'ning lust of gold,—

Worse than the rude idolatry of old.
They poured the intoxicating draughts of fire,
Enhanced the value of unchaste desire.
In lieu of healing, sickness entered in,—
And foul disease,—dire legacy of sin.
Thus God's kind purpose men profane reverse,
He will'd a blessing, but they left a curse.

Lo ! the poor Indian now ! from street to street
In cast-off finery, with naked feet,
Listlessly strolling, object of contempt,—
His claims neglected and his lands pre-empt,—
Despoiled, uncared for, destitute he roams,
A homeless exile, 'mid his native homes !
Or like the leper, doomed apart to dwell,
Making his Indian camp a shameless hell !
Sad is the picture ! Sad the Indian's fate !
Are there no works of mercy to relate,
Done for the love of Him who died for all ?
The recognition of our common fall,
And common hope of life beyond the grave,
Trusting in Him who has the power to save ?
Ah ! lose not faith 'mid scenes of sin and woe !—
See ! through the darkness breaks the morning glow !
Down o'er the distant hills there shoots a ray
Of brighter omen for the coming day.
There is a happy spot of busy life
Where order reigns, where hush'd the din of strife,
Harmonious brethren 'neath paterna' rule,
Ply their glad tasks in Methlacatla's school.
There Duncan holds supreme his peaceful throne,
His power unquestioned, and their rights his own.
Anvil and hammer, saw and wheel resound,

And useful arts of industry abound,—
While faith and knowledge find an altar there,
In " Learning's " hall, and stately house of prayer.
Are these the ignoble scions of a race
Whom proud presumption scarce reserves a place
On their own shores, where once they wandered free
From Rocky Mountains to the boundless sea ?
These, the poor Indians, barbarous and wild,
By God forsaken, and by man reviled !
Yes ! these are they whom Christian love can train,
Loos'ning the bands of Satan's deadly chain,—
And pouring on their souls the Gospel light,
Amid the darkness of their heathen night.
Ye white invaders of the Indian's land,
This was your mission—this your Lord's command :
" Go ye and teach all nations 'neath the sun,"
This is the work a Duncan has begun !

Nor must we pass in cold oblivion by
Those other scenes of Christ-like charity,—
Where earnest priests have daily prayed and taught
With self-denying zeal,—hoping for naught
Of earthly " guerdon," but their sure reward—
The eternal benediction of the Lord.
Welcome ! bright records of each golden deed
Of patient faith ! Ye who have sown the seed
In tears, shall doubtless come again with joy,
Bringing your sheaves, unmix'd with sin's alloy !
Then, like the stars, throughout the ages shine,
Devoted messengers of truth divine !

The evening shadows deepen—but I feel
The sunset glory o'er my spirit steal,—
As tho' the blackness of the forest cope

Shone with the rich embroidery of hope.
Cheer'd thus, I rose to happier thoughts and said,
"Not yet, O Lord, thy work is finished !
Thou hast a remnant left, that have not bow'd
The knee to Baal with the worldling crowd,
Who flock from far to seek the golden ore,
Or in the bowels of the earth explore
The uncertain veins of darker mineral wealth,
Careless alike of country, home, or health."
Ah ! there are treasures of a countless price,
More worth than these your living sacrifice !
Reluctant depths may yield their glittering dross,—
Devoid of blessing, all your gains are loss.
Lo ! 'round your fruitful mines the Indians wait,
Poor Lazari before the rich man's gate !
Craving a pittance from these plenteous hordes
Your arts have gathered, and their land affords.
Make these your friends, ye almoners of God !
Relieve their wants, and stay the avenging rod !
Teach them above all secret stores of earth
To prize the treasures of celestial birth ;
Teach them to live the higher life—to die
In joyful hope of immortality !
That when your day-dreams of ambition fail,
And from the future drops the enshrouding veil,—
When nations tremble and the saints rejoice
To hear the summons of the Archangel's voice,—
Ye sons of wisdom ! who have led the van
Of human progress and the rights of man,
May find your loving kindness not in vain,
When earthly loss becomes eternal gain,
And the poor Indian shall forever bless
Your well-spent mammon of unrighteousness !

